

## **Broadening the Public Sphere: Examining the Role of Community Radio in Fostering Participatory Democracy in Selected Communities in Ondo State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract :** Since May 1999, when Nigeria returned to uninterrupted democratic rule, there have been various attempts by successive governments at committing themselves to democratic ideals. Such efforts include a revision of communication policies after repeated calls by civil society organisations, development partners, researchers, and academics to allow not only the commencement of campus radio broadcasting but also the takeoff of community radio broadcasting. Thus, in 2015, operating licenses were granted to several communities spread across the six geopolitical zones in the country for the establishment of community radio stations culminating in the establishment of the first community radio in Nigeria on July 17, 2015. And, since citizens' involvement in policy matters and governance is one of the tenets of participatory democracy, it becomes imperative to investigate how the emerging community radio sector in Nigeria is facilitating participatory democracy among Nigerians, even in the face of attempts by the present government to silence all dissenting voices. This study, therefore, examines how residents in Ondo State, Southwest Nigeria, are utilising programmes on Ejule Nen and Kakaaki community radio stations in Ondo State, Nigeria, to deepen participatory democracy. Much of the existing studies on the role of community radio in participatory democracy and citizens' engagement efforts miss out on Nigeria because of the delayed implementation of community radio policy in Nigeria being Africa's most populous nation as well as a major player in the affairs of the African continent. While the participatory communication and communication infrastructure theories were used as framework, data were collected from in-depth interviews with staff of the community radio station and community leaders, focus group discussions with the community residents, and qualitative content analysis of programmes on the station. The residents used the community radio stations as platforms for demanding accountability from government, mobilising resources for the execution of a number of community projects, promoting credible electoral practices, and influencing the implementation of free education policy in their communities. Hence the community radio stations became the reliable and authoritative voices of residents for participating in the public sphere and, generally, the democratic process.

**Keywords :** community, community radio, democracy, participatory democracy

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